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RR-88-51

1988

CUBA:CRISIS

CUBAN GOVERNMENT CONFRONTS COSTLY CRISIS IN PORTS:

BY LIONEL MARTIN

HAVANA, AUG 25, REUTER - THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT HAS ANNOUNCED EMERGENCY PLANS TO OVERCOME THE CRITICAL PILEUP OF MERCHANDISE IN THE NATION'S PORTS WHICH IS COSTING IT MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN PENALTY PAY TO FOREIGN SHIPOWNERS AND IS DISRUPTING THE ECONOMY.

THE EMERGENCY PLAN IS DESCRIBED IN A FRONT PAGE STORY IN FRIDAY'S OFFCIAL NEWSPAPER, GRANMA, HEADLINED: +WORK DAY AND NIGHT AND EVERY DAY+ WITH A SUB-HEADLINE: +EXTRACT 705,000 TONNES OVER THE NEXT 30 DAY.+

THE ARTICLE SPEAKS OF +THE CRITICAL PILING UP (ABARROTAMIENTO) OF GOODS WHICH EXISTS IN THE WAREHOUSES AND YARDS OF THE PORTS WHICH SERIOUSLY THREATENS TO PARALYZE THE LOADING AND UNLOADING OF IMPORTED AND EXPORTED MERCHANDISE,WITH THE RESULTING DAMGE TO THE NATIONAL ECONOMY.+ +IN AN OPEN ECONOMY LIKE OURS, THE PORTS ARE DECISIVE AND IF THEY ARE PARALYZED, THE ECONOMY MIGHT BECOME PARALYZED,+ GRANMA SAID.

THE EMERGENCY PLAN CALLS FOR THE DOCK WORKERS, ON SHIFTS, TO WORK TWENTY FOUR HOURS A DAY. IT ALSO MAKES IT MANDITORY THAT THE NATIONS' WAREHOUSES BE PREPARED TO RECEIVE MERCHANDISE DURING 16 HOURS A DAY INSTEAD OF THE TRADITIONAL EIGHT.

THE ARTICLE SAID THAT THE CRISIS IS SO SERIOUS THAT ANY SHIP THAT ARRIVES DURING THE SECOND HALF OF AUGUST WILL HAVE TO WAIT AT LEAST THREE WEEKS TO BEGIN UNLOADING.

IT SAID THAT ON AUGUST 15 THE PORTS WERE CRAMAMED WITH 311,000 TONNES OF MERCHANDISE, TWICE THE ACCEPTABLE LEVEL. IT SAID THAT ON THAT DAY THERE WAS ANOTHER 429,000 TONNES OF MERCHANDISE ON 68 CARGO SHIPS WAITING THEIR TURN TO DOCK.

THE ARTICLE ATTRIBUTED THE CRISIS IN PART TO THE SERIOUS SHORTAGE OF TRUCKS TO MAKE PICKUPS AT THE PORTS. IT SAID THAT 44 PORCENT OF THE TRUCKS BELONGING TO THE MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT, THE NATION'S BIGGEST CARGO HANDLER, ARE NOT IN WORKING CONDITION. IT POINTED TO THE CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF TYRES, BATTERIES AND SPARE PARTS FOR THE TRUCKS.

UNDER THE CONTRACTS WITH THE OWNERS OF FOREIGN SHIPS, THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT MUST PAY A PENALTY FOR UNDUE DELAYS IN LOADING OR UNLOADING THEIR SHIPS. GRANMA DID NOT MENTION THE AMOUNT OF MONEY PAID OUT IN PENALTIES BUT A CUBAN OFFICIAL SAID THAT IT WAS +MANY MILLIONS OF DOLLARS AND WE EXPECT IT TO BE MUCH MORE.+

THE ARTICLE SAID THAT THE PORT CRISIS HAS HAD SERIOUS REPERCUSSIONS IN THE NATIONAL ECONOMY WHICH DESPERATELY NEEDS SOME OF THE RAW MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT AND OTHER GOODS NOW SITTING ON THE DOCKS OR ON SHIPS IN CUBAN WATERS.

=REUTER/LEM

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